

'Incalculable harm' to Allies

35 YEARS FOR MASTER SPY

Confession led wife
to give him up

By ALAN COPPS

GEOFFREY PRIME, a "ruthless and rationally-motivated spy" in the words of Lord Chief Justice, Lord Lane, was jailed for 35 years at the Old Bailey yesterday for 14 years of treachery that caused "incalculable harm" to Britain and her allies.



Geoffrey Arthur Prime in custody in July.

Communications centre in Cheltenham, lived a triple life—as a spy for Russia, as a devoted step-father, and as a sexual and social misfit.

It was his lust for young girls that led to his downfall. After being arrested on sex charges he confessed to his second wife, Rhona, that he was also an agent for Russia.

She found his spying equipment in a plastic bag under a bed at their home in Cheltenham and, after three weeks of agonising, told the police.

Prime, 44, had the full paraphernalia of espionage.

It included a miniature camera to photograph documents, special writing paper to carry coded messages, a powerful radio to receive coded transmissions and a tape recorder to help decipher them.

Prime was also given "one time pads" on which he could decipher coded radio messages and encypher his replies and envelopes pre-addressed to East Berlin to carry messages in invisible code. All this was contained in a brief case with a false bottom.

Codename 'Rowlands'

His controllers, known as Igor and Valva, gave him the codename 'Rowlands' and a password.

His contact would say: "I believe we met in Pittsburgh in 1968."

Prime was to reply: "No, at that time I was in Berlin."

He had been taught how to receive and handle microdot communications and was given training in East Berlin in the dead-letter box procedure.

Throughout his spy career he sent regular details of top-secret documents.

His meeting with his masters took him to East Berlin, Vienna, once to a Russian cruise boat on the Danube, and to Potsdam in East Germany.

But when it came to explaining the material that Prime passed to his Russian spy-masters at those meetings and its potential damage to Western security, the No. 1 court at the Old Bailey sat in camera.

The case of Prime, who worked for nearly 10 years at the Government communication headquarters in London and Cheltenham, has already caused fears about a rift between British and United States intelligence agencies.

Mrs Thatcher is to make a statement about the case in the Commons today and she is certain to face fierce questioning from MPs demanding to know how Prime twice passed the positive vetting procedure designed to weed out potential

£7,000 pay

During his years as a K G B agent Prime collected more than £7,000 from his paymasters.

In 1976, when his career both at the communications H Q and in the K G B was at its height, his controller informed him that if he ever wished to defect he would be given a pension and the rank of colonel.

Prime pleaded guilty at the Old Bailey to seven counts under the Official Secrets Act of communicating information useful to an enemy. He also admitted three charges of indecently assaulting young girls, for which he was jailed for three years.

Now a broken and remorseful man, who appeared drawn and weary as he sat in the dock, Prime has promised to co-operate fully with the security services to repair whatever he can of the damage he caused. But much of it is irreparable.

In a 30-page confession, Prime said he first offered his services to the K G B while serving with the R A F in Berlin in 1963 "partly as a result of a misplaced idealistic view

of Soviet socialism which was compounded by basic psychological problems within myself."

When they question Mrs Thatcher today, MPs will also want to know why there was no inquiry after Prime, tiring of his life of deception, suddenly left the communications H Q in 1977, even though by that time he had risen to be a section head dealing with decisions "of the utmost secrecy".

In the event, Prime was questioned about espionage only after Mrs Prime had seen the police while her husband was in custody for sex assaults against young girls.

Prime, said yesterday, by Mr George Carman Q C, defending, to have had an unhappy childhood which made him a "sexual and social misfit," first made contact with the K G B after leaving a message at a Berlin checkpoint in 1968.

The reply came in a metal cylinder attached to his car.

He met his contacts, Igor and Valya, at the Friedrichstrasse station, gave them information, and was encouraged by them to pursue his application for a job as a linguist in the Civil Service.

His application was successful and after passing the positive vetting procedure he began working for the Government's communications H Q in London.

During that time he received and conveyed information to Russia by radio, picked up money and spying materials and left documents at dead-letter boxes in the London suburbs.

As his seniority in the Civil Service increased he was transferred to Cheltenham and he made more contacts with the Soviet spy controllers in Vienna.

In his last year at Cheltenham he took 15 rolls of film amounting to about 500 photographs of top secret documents.

But a year after marrying his present wife in 1976 and playing the part of a loving father to her three sons he tired of deception and left his Government job.

Twice he booked flights to Helsinki with the intention of defecting, but each time the pull of his new family held him back. He turned to a new life as a taxi driver.

But he still had information the Russians wanted and twice more they contacted him.

He flew to Vienna to deliver his films of documents and last year, on his final contact with his spymasters, he flew to Berlin and was taken to Potsdam to be questioned about top secret allied activities.

It was during his time as a taxi driver that he carried out a series of sex attacks and drew a card index of 2,287 potential young victims.

He was arrested on April 28 and first questioned about spying on June 8. At first he made a series of confusing denials and partial admissions.

But on June 26, after long questioning by Det. Chief Supt David Cole, he made a full confession which ended with words of regret and remorse.

Mr Carman asked Lord Lane not to pass the "maximum kind of sentence for the worst possible sort of traitor" albeit the damage inflicted by Prime was of a very grave order.

He said Prime had co-operated with the authorities to enable them to isolate, detect and hopefully arrest the damage at the earliest possible moment after detection.

There had been several long gaps in Prime's activities over the years, Mr Carman added.

Prime was "desperately lonely and totally inadequate."

Wife praised

"It is the misfits of society that provide the fertile breeding ground for the ruthless propaganda of the soviet system and its capacity to foster treachery under the guise of idealism," he said.

Passing sentence Lord Lane told Prime: "Whatever has come out of this case, your wife has come out of it with great credit.

"But the court has heard enough about your activities . . . to realise that by your treachery you have done incalculable harm to the interests and security of this country and the interests and security of our friends and allies."